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TITLE: Targeted Opt-in vs. Routine Opt-out HIV Testing in an STD Clinic

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BACKGROUND: Despite several strategies for targeting HIV testing, blinded prevalence studies revealed that half of HIV-positive clients in some Texas STD clinics were not tested.

OBJECTIVE: To compare the acceptance and effectiveness of a new “opt-out” approach (routine HIV test included in clinic consent and done on all clients unless refused; prevention counseling offered to all clients but not required before testing) with the usual “opt-in” approach (clients offered prevention counseling and elect HIV testing by signing a separate consent.)

METHODS: During 6-month periods before and after initiation of the opt-out approach, STD programs in Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and Lubbock collected data on the number of clients tested, counseled, and their HIV test results; for HIV-positive clients, the number referred to Early Intervention and the number of new HIV-infected partners identified.

RESULTS:

	STD clients	Tested	Pre-test counseled	New HIV+	Engaged in Early Intervention	New HIV+ partners
Opt-in	31,558	14,927	15,038	147	91	10
Opt-out	34,511	23,020	11,466	209	172	30
Difference	+9%	+54%	-23%	+42%	+89%	+200%

CONCLUSIONS: The opt-out approach was effective for these STD clinics, because more clients received testing, more HIV-infected persons learned their status and entered treatment, and more HIV-positive partners learned of their infection. However, other approaches are required to increase the number of clients who accept prevention counseling.

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